



Access Services 357-8686

CABLE SERVICES BUREAU



Libraries Division

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The Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

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Gentlemen:

This letter is in response to your Notice of Inquiry regarding closed captioning and video description of television programming. Television broadcasters, cable operators and other video program providers need to hear from the Federal Communications Commission and the public about the importance of closed captioning and video description. For those who are deaf or hearing impaired, closed captioning is the difference between understanding and ignorance. For people with vision problems, descriptive video gives the written word on the screen and the visual images meaning.

Television is a major form of education and communication in the United States. People who are deaf are shut out from the news, the advertising, the information available through television without closed captioning. In South Florida, only one television channel does closed captioning (WPLG Channel 10 in Miami) and they should be commended for doing this. They close caption the news broadcasts.

The Broward County Library circulates descriptive videos and the recipients frequently report back to me how much more meaningful the movie experience is with descriptive video. When voice overs read the credits or any of the words on the screen ( like the endings of films that tell what happened to the characters after the movie ends ) my friends applaud. Being given the opportunity to participate more fully through descriptive video, which does much more than the voice over for which so many are thankful, is just part of the benefit of providing this service. An educated, involved public is just what our country needs most.

I would like to see the FCC working with the television and cable industries to develop a way to provide these services in a cost effective way. Then, whatever the cost, the television and cable companies should be required to provide the service. The television and cable companies should be required to purchase the equipment needed and provide the service for its own productions as well as for all materials produced elsewhere but shown by their company. Whether the T.V. and cable stations should be allowed to charge outside producers for the service needs to be investigated further. I believe the cost of doing the captioning would become minor if the equipment to do it was owned by every

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T.V. and cable company. As more and more new television sets are purchased with the circuitry capable of receiving and displaying closed captioning, the next step, requiring that closed captioning be done, must be taken.

I don't know how many deaf people will respond to your notice of inquiry. I felt I needed to respond to speak for those I know who dream of the day when all audio on T.V., in movie theaters and on videocassette will be closed captioned and realtime captioning will be provided for live events. The FCC has the power to make this dream a reality in the near future. I urge you to work with the producers, the T.V. and cable company owners, to bring about this commitment to education and accessibility.

I don't know how many blind and visually impaired people will respond to your notice of inquiry. I felt I needed to speak for those who cannot write to say how important television is to people with little or no vision. I am frequently asked why blind people watch T.V. or go to movies. What would they get out of such activities ? is the usual question. The answer is that T.V. and movies are an inherent part of our culture and any blind person who does not listen to these avenues of communication and get what they can from listening, loses touch with people and the world. How much more could be gained from this participation if video description was part of every program ? Again, I urge you to work with those in control of T.V. and cable companies to work on providing these services to people who miss the nuances and full meaning of events because they cannot see them. Video description is also an issue of education and accessibility.

I hope that you are overwhelmed with responses to your inquiry. However, written communication is usually not the hallmark of the two communities which need these services. If there is not an outpouring of replies do not attribute it to lack of interest or need. Just work harder to insure that full communication through T.V. and cable is achieved. T.V. and cable is the way to reach those previously not reached or incompletely reached, to inform, to educate, to inspire and to entertain. These are everyone's needs. You can make this happen.

Thank you for all you have done to date. The Television Decoder Circuitry Act was a landmark achievement. Keep up the good work.

Very truly yours,

*Joann Block*

Joann Block, Coordinator  
Broward County Library Access Services